

# Building on Heritage, Preserving Heritage: Music Work in Southern Africa, 1976–2016

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*The Constitution on the Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council opened the way for the use of folk music in Catholic worship. The author's work in African church music grew out of this. Lack of official policy for the conservation of Southern Africa's musical heritage led the author to use opportunities arising from church music work to record and document traditional music. Later he was given the opportunity to bring traditional music into the syllabuses of the Fort Hare University music department. Although not a stated policy this clearly suited the post-apartheid university leadership. The article traces the work of the author in these fields.*

## Introduction

Here are some definitions that have been offered for applied ethnomusicology:

“Applied ethnomusicology is any use of ethnomusicological knowledge to influence social interaction, to maintain or change social conditions, or to direct the course of cultural change.”<sup>1</sup>

“Applied ethnomusicology is the approach guided by principles of social responsibility, which extends the usual academic goal of broadening and deepening knowledge and understanding toward solving concrete problems and toward working both inside and beyond typical academic contexts.”<sup>2</sup>

“Applied ethnomusicology is a philosophical approach to the study of music in culture, with social responsibility and social justice as guiding principals.”<sup>3</sup>

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1 Pettan 2008, 90.

2 Pettan & Titon, 2015, 30, quoting Harrison & Pettan 2010, 1.

3 Loughran 2008, 92.

## PART OF THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA Showing Places of Special Musical Interest

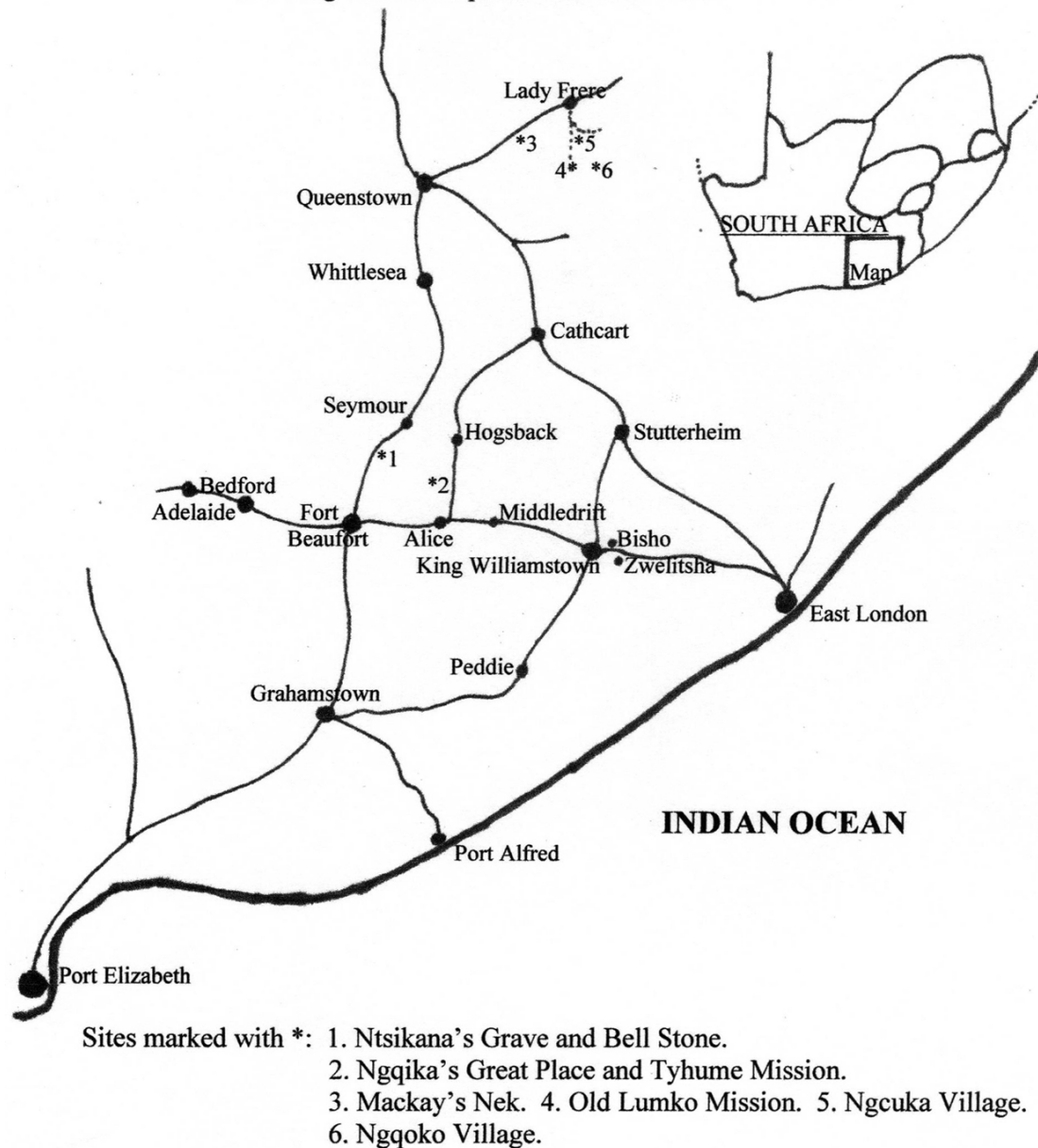


Figure 1. Map of part of the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.  
The Map shows places featuring in this article. Lumko is site no. 4 near Lady Frere. Fort Hare University has campuses in East London and in Alice.

"Applied ethnomusicology puts ethnomusicological scholarship, knowledge and understanding to practical use. ... More specifically, ... applied ethnomusicology is best regarded a music centered intervention in a particular community, whose purpose is to benefit that community – for example, a social improvement, a musical benefit, a cultural good, an economic advantage, or a combination of these and other benefits."<sup>4</sup>

4 Pettan and Titon 2015, 4.

Daniel Sheehy has the following to say:

(Applied ethnomusicology) has been praised as an avenue to benefit humanity in ways that the academy has not.... If ethnomusicology is an approach to the study of the music of the world's peoples, then applied ethnomusicology is *an approach to the approach* to the study of the music of the world's peoples. It is ... something more fundamental that informs all one's actions as an ethnomusicologist.<sup>5</sup>

The above definitions of Applied Ethnomusicology all agree that it is the use of ethnomusicological knowledge for the benefit of people. Underlying it at base are social responsibility and social justice, both of which suffered profoundly under the system of apartheid in South Africa. Some particular aspects referred to in the definitions include: to maintain or change social conditions, or to direct the course of cultural change;<sup>6</sup> to benefit that community – for example, a social improvement, a musical benefit, a cultural good, an economic advantage;<sup>7</sup> in terms of an ethical responsibility to “pay back” those whose music and lives we study.<sup>8</sup>

In the light of these definitions and descriptions, I believe that I was working as an applied ethnomusicologist before I had any claim to be an ethnomusicologist. I had to learn as I went on with the work. Once the work had begun, it could not be stopped. I had jumped into deep water, and I had no option but to keep on swimming.

The article covers two main time periods, each associated with an institution and its policies. In the first period, from 1976 to 1989, the institution was the Catholic Church, the policy involved an important change regarding the music of the Church. In the second period, from 1995 to the present, the institution was a South African university; the policy change was the need to make the previously almost-ignored study of African music the most important focus in the music department. During the whole of the time period, from 1976 to the present, run two themes. The first of these is heritage: discovering, preserving and promoting the musical heritage of indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. The second theme is creativity: building on the traditional music heritage in attempt to creatively answer new needs.

In addition to the definitions quoted above, certain ideals are expressed in suggested definitions for applied ethnomusicology taken from the sub-section headed “Defining Applied Ethnomusicology” on the Internet page of the Applied Ethnomusicology Section of the Society for Ethnomusicology,<sup>9</sup> as follows:

“We are ... ethnomusicologists with a strong desire to make the world a better place through our work.”

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5 Sheehy 1992, 323.

6 Pettan 2008, 90.

7 Titon 2015, 4.

8 Sheehy 1992, 323.

9 Society for Ethnomusicology 2016.

“We strive to empower individuals and communities.”

“For me, what distinguishes applied work is the advocacy and social justice aspect of it.”

The ideals expressed in the above declarations by applied ethnomusicologists inspire one to believe that the study of the music of the peoples of the world is something most worthwhile, that music is something way above mere entertainment or a way to make money. When I began my work to promote the production of new African church music, I was 38 years of age and still very idealistic in outlook. But at that moment, the thoughts in my mind were focused on two questions: Would the people I would be working with actually compose new church songs? And would any of their songs make use of the African techniques of melody, scale, harmony, form and rhythm?

## **A Change of Policy regarding Church Music in the Catholic Church**

In 1970, with degrees in theology and in music I was working as a Catholic priest in East London in the diocese of Port Elizabeth in South Africa, Archbishop Denis Hurley of Durban, the noted anti-apartheid activist, asked me whether I would be willing to work for the promotion of new music for the Catholic Church in African styles. The possibility of developing Catholic liturgical music in the styles of non-Western cultures had been considered more than once in the past. New impetus was given to this by the Constitution on the Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.<sup>10</sup> The way was opened to bring the use of folk music into the Catholic Liturgy, and also for my involvement in this field.

## **New Catholic Church Music for South Africa**

In Zimbabwe, the drive for liberation expressed in the freedom struggle there led to a revival of traditional music, including among the Shona people a revival in the use of the *mbira dzavadzimu*.<sup>11</sup> This had the natural spin-off that church members in Zimbabwe desired to bring their own music into their worship. The Protestant Churches were ahead of the Catholics, but the Catholics were striving to catch up.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Paul VI 1963.

<sup>11</sup> See Dargie 1984, 10.

<sup>12</sup> For example, this was so regarding production of church songs (including church freedom songs) in African style through the work of Protestant musicians and musicologists, including Patrick Matsikenyiri, Olof Axelsson, Robert Kauffman, former Zimbabwean President Rev. Canaan Banana and others. See Hawn 2003, 148–188.

Fritz Lobinger and Oswald Hirmer, two German Catholic missionaries working in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, had already begun working for the development of new church music in traditional style for use in Xhosa congregations in South Africa. Catholic church music in Xhosa had been limited to the use of Xhosa texts set to western hymn tunes. Lobinger and Hirmer took the step of commissioning the noted Xhosa choral composer, B. K. Tyamzashe (a Presbyterian) to compose music in Xhosa style for the Catholic Church.

Tyamzashe composed a number of songs, which later found their way into the Xhosa Catholic hymnal.<sup>13</sup> Some have proved lastingly popular, especially his *Missa I*. This Mass was published through the Catholic Lumko Pastoral Institute at a conference called by Lobinger and Hirmer at Lumko in 1965.<sup>14</sup> I was at that conference and returned with a copy of the *Missa I*. In 1966 I began work at the Catholic Church in the township of Zwelitsha near King Williams Town. The choir leader there, Lambert Mpotulo, taught the *Missa I* with great enthusiasm to the choir and congregation. One result of Mpotulo's work was that we soon had to have more church benches made, as the singing drew in more and more worshippers.

The *Gloria* of *Missa I* used a striking chord pattern, alternating F major and G major chords, as shown in the excerpt in Figure 2.



Figure 2. An excerpt from Tyamzashe's *Gloria* of his *Missa 1*.<sup>15</sup>

This type of chord usage, a method of tonality shift based on the method of playing the most important Xhosa traditional musical instrument, the *uhadi* musical bow, was something new to me.<sup>16</sup> I asked Hirmer how Tyamzashe got the idea for his *Gloria*. Hirmer told me he had asked Tyamzashe, who said he was inspired by the *Great Hymn* of the Prophet Ntsikana. Ntsikana (d. 1821) was the first Xhosa Christian who not only preached to his own people, but also composed hymns in

13 This hymnal, *Bongan' iNkosi*, is included in the section of references as PCXR n.d. Oswald Hirmer was the editor, and the hymnal appeared in 1979, but these facts are not stated in the hymnal itself.

14 Lumko Institute was based (until 1985) at the old Lumko Mission about 60 kilometres east of the town of Queenstown, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa (see Figure 1). In 1985, Lumko moved to Germiston.

15 Figure 2 is taken from Dargie 1988, 131.

16 See Dargie 1988, 76 & 78.

traditional style for his followers. Figure 3 shows an excerpt from Ntsikana's *Great Hymn* as it has been handed down in Church use.<sup>17</sup>

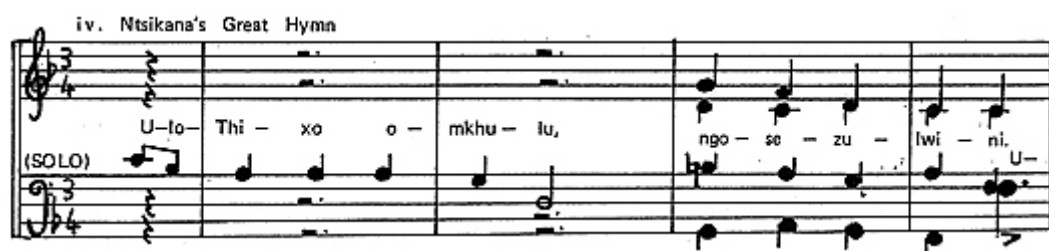


Figure 3. The beginning of Ntsikana's *Great Hymn* as it is often sung in churches.<sup>18</sup>

The “inner melody” of Figure 2 is the melody for the tenor solo which begins Tyamzashe's *Gloria* (sung to the text “*Uzuko kuThixo enyangweni*” – “Glory to God in the Highest”). This “inner melody” is closely related to the opening melody of Ntsikana's Great hymn, which is begun by the tenor and continued by the soprano in Figure 3. However, the “upper melody” (soprano part) of Figure 2 may have been based on another Xhosa traditional song, “*Umgungqel' indawo*,” shown in Figure 4 below.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 4. A vocal canon from the song *Umgungqel' indawo*.

Tyamzashe's *Gloria* marked the first usage of traditional Xhosa harmony in Catholic church music. In addition, the “upper melody” in Figure 2 uses an additive rhythm pattern,  $3+2+3=8$  beats. This additive rhythm is used in the song “*Umagungqel' indawo*,” and forms a polyrhythmic pattern with the tenor “inner melody.” Such a usage of rhythm was also a first in Xhosa Catholic church music.

17 On the music of Ntsikana, see Dargie 1988, 194–205, and Dargie 1982. For information on Ntsikana's life and work, see Hodgson 1980 and 1985.

18 Figure 3 is taken from Dargie 1988, 199. It is based on a performance recorded by Hugh Tracey: Tracey 1957.

19 Dargie 1988, 131.



## The Author's Involvement in the Project

After working in English-language parishes, in 1974 I began in Grahamstown as a chaplain at Rhodes University. I registered for a doctorate in composition of church music in English, and from mid-1977 to the end of 1978 I taught music theory in the music department. In 1976, when nearly 38 years old, I was approached by Hirmer and Lobinger with a view to promoting the production of new songs for the proposed new Catholic Xhosa hymnal mentioned above, of which Hirmer had been appointed editor. Hirmer wished to have psalms and psalm responses included in the hymnal. Such short responses gave excellent opportunities for the use of African style, with call-and-response form and the use of response form and the involvement of body movement in the rhythm.<sup>20</sup> As a preparatory step, Hirmer and Lobinger sent me to attend a composition workshop for church music in Ndebele, the second main language of Zimbabwe, to be conducted by Olof Axelsson at the Kwanongoma College of Music in Bulawayo, of which Axelsson was the director. The workshop took place over the last week of 1976 and the first week of 1977. I arranged that three other South Africans should also attend the workshop. They included Stephen Cuthbert Molefe, a prolific composer of choral music in Sotho, Zulu and other African languages. Molefe's music was often very lively and often used call-and-response structure.

The workshop at Kwanongoma was attended by 29 people who composed 28 new songs during the workshop. I came back, full of enthusiasm, to report to Hirmer and Lobinger. I suggested that we hold a workshop for the composition of new songs for the hymnal, and Hirmer at once went about setting up the workshop. It would be held at Zwelitsha, at the church where I had once worked with composer Lambert Mpotulo. Hirmer prepared placards with psalm response texts to be set to music, and also distributed texts in advance to known composers, including Molefe and Mpotulo. Hirmer had Molefe, who was at Vosloorus near Germiston east of Johannesburg, and 12 of his choir flown down to the Eastern Cape. The workshop, held over the Easter weekend of 1977, produced 53 new songs, including Molefe's *Great Amen*, which appeared in the new hymnbook as "*Masithi – Amen*" ("Let us say – Amen"). This song has since spread over the world, and is now in many hymnals in Europe, America, the Far East and elsewhere.

I soon found opportunities to conduct further workshops in other languages. The first of these was at Redacres near Pietermaritzburg in Kwazulu-Natal in June 1977. The main organizer was Archbishop Hurley. By the end of 1978 I had 8 further workshops, one in Xhosa (at Lumko at the end of 1977), one in Zulu (at Mariannhill monastery near Durban), three in Tswana and two in Sotho. The songs from these workshops were later published, in both staff and sol-fa notation, by Lumko.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> It is useful to consider the use of rhythm in western music rather as passive compared to its more active use in Xhosa (and other African) music. See Dargie 1988, 82.

<sup>21</sup> Dargie 1979.

## **Ways of Building New Songs: Methods of Group Composition**

In the Zwelitsha workshop I imitated the Kwanongoma workshop, simply inviting the gathered musicians to compose new songs. However, as early as the Redacres workshop, it sometimes became clear that the participants needed to find a way into creative composing. I had been thinking over something I had learned from Oswald Hirmer.

Xhosa, like the very great majority of African languages, is tonal. European melodies do not fit the tone patterns of African texts, and the accents in the melodies very rarely fit the accents of African speech. Changing the speech tones can change the meaning of the words. The most famous example of this happening in African church singing is recounted by Lazarus N. Ekwueme,<sup>22</sup> who tells how pairing an English hymn tune with a translation of its lyrics in the Igbo language of Nigeria changed the meaning of the words from “there is no sorrow in heaven” to “there is no egg on the bicycle.” The least obnoxious result of misuse of speech tones in singing is simply to render the words meaningless. Hugh Tracey described the result as “sacred gibberish.”<sup>23</sup>

Hirmer told me how he got Xhosa youngsters to create songs by having one go some distance from the group and shout a text to those in the group. When shouting over a distance, Xhosa people will strongly emphasize the speech tones, so that even if their words are not clearly audible over the distance, the tone pattern will enable the hearer to distinguish the words. As a boy visiting farms of my relatives, I heard this myself several times when people on a mountainside shouted to others in the valley below. Hirmer would then urge the group of hearers to sing what they had heard, and so new melodies could be developed that suited the tones of the text.

At Redacres, I put the same system to work in a different manner. I asked the workshop participants to recite a text together, urging them to emphasize the tones, and then go from speaking to singing. In this way, four new songs were created.<sup>24</sup> From that time on I frequently began composition workshops with a group composition going from speech to singing. Drummers were asked to accompany the spoken texts, beating on the accents of speech, so that a new song could develop that correctly reflected the tones and accents of the text. Such a group composition was not only useful for creating a new song, it also taught new composers a way of putting a song together. In time, highly refined methods of group composition were developed, including using a speaker selected by the group as tone exemplar, and also methods of working with traditional musicians. When a bow player was present, the player was asked how her/his bow would sing

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22 Ekwueme 1972/4, 15.

23 Tracey 1959.

24 Dargie 1979, Redacres song nos 3, 15, 27 and 28.



the words of the text. Musical bows are considered as singers taking part in a song, as is clear from the way musicians speak about the bows.<sup>25</sup> Bows “speak” texts by reproducing the tone patterns, as do the talking drums of West Africa.

Various methods of group composition used in my workshops are described in Dargie 1983. The handbook and 2-CD set Dargie 2012 was designed to demonstrate group composition work in practice, using recordings of group composition taking place and then the finished compositions from a workshop I conducted in Bunya, Kavango, Namibia, in 1979. The following examples, Figures 5, 6 and 7 are from the Bunya workshop. Figure 5 shows the pronunciation of the text *Tanga nokufumadeka Hompa*, which means “Praise and glorify the Lord” in the Kavango Rukwangali language.

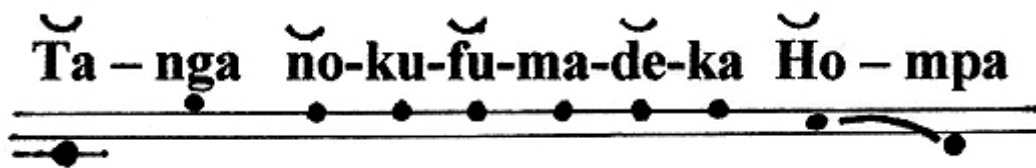


Figure 5. Tone patterns of a text.

Figure 6 shows how the spoken text became a melody, as realized by a schoolgirl during the speaking of the text. (The process lasted well over half-an-hour; the full composition took one-and-a-half hours.) The sung melody clearly has the same tone pattern as the spoken text, except that at the end of the second phrase the melody rises (a usage common in neo-African music). The melody uses a pentatonic scale, with use of Afro-diatonic harmony.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 6. Realization of a melody for the text.

Figure 7 is drawn from the performance of the finished composition, with use of drums including a cross-rhythm of 4 beats of the *mundindi* drum to 3 beats of the other drums. The harmony is typical of Kavango usage of Afro-diatonic techniques.

<sup>25</sup> See Dargie 1988, 51–52, 64.

<sup>26</sup> “Neo-African” as used here, also called “neo-traditional,” refers to African musical styles combining traditional and exogenous elements. “Afro-diatonic” is a term I use for African ways of using western diatonic scales and harmonies, which are combined with African techniques like blues notes and the use of parallel harmonies.

DRUMS: KURUGOMA

MUNDINDI

NKINZO (?)

RESPONSE

Ta - nga no-kufu-ma-deka Ho-mpa, ta - nga noku-fuma-deka Ho - mpa. (Ta-

Followers

Ta - nga no-kufu-ma-de-ka Hompa, ta - nga noku-fuma-deka Ho - mpa. (Ta-

Harmony parts

Verse melody

(Ta-nga...)

Ta -

Figure 7. A transcription of the composition.

After this first composition, which took the complete first session on the first morning of the workshop, in the rest of that day and until the following midday, when the workshop ended, the participants composed a further twelve songs, including a complete new sung mass, building on the techniques used in the opening group composition. More than half of the thirteen songs use traditional tetratonic Kavango scales and harmony whereas some others use pentatonic scales (e.g., “*Tanga nokufumadeka Hompa*”).<sup>27</sup>

One great virtue of the group composition method I used was that it was quite unnecessary for me to know anything about the musical style of the workshop participants. I guided them, certainly, but the creativity came directly from them. A melody would be created, sometimes by the whole group but sometimes just by some participant grasping the melodies implied in the spoken words. Then, without any encouragement usually being necessary, the group would take over the melody and at once use with it the methods of harmony typical to the musical style. When different singers sing the same text at different (consonant) pitch levels, then they necessarily follow the same (speech) tone patterns and so create systems

27 See also Dargie 2013.

of parallel harmony.<sup>28</sup> Use of parallel harmony is common in musics of Southern Africa. Minimal encouragement might be necessary for the participants to create leader parts, either short lead-ins to the melody or sometimes by having the whole melody sung first by the leaders, and then by the followers. The participants always had clear ideas how to use drums and rhythmic instruments in the new songs. I called myself the “catalyst,” making things happen while somehow not being involved directly in the process.

In the period between Easter 1977 and mid-1989, when I left Lumko, I conducted some 70 composition workshops. These ranged from a day to two weeks in length. Workshops produced from perhaps 10 or 12 new songs to sometimes over 70. Altogether nearly two thousand new songs were composed.<sup>29</sup> The songs were published by Lumko on audio tapes and with texts. I was quite unable to cope with transcribing everything although I transcribed as much as I could.

## Ways into a Technical Understanding of African Music

In 1979 I was taken onto the full-time staff of the Catholic Lumko Pastoral Institute to open a department of church music. Lumko Institute was situated near the town of Lady Frere: see no. 4 on the Map, Figure 1. I decided that the best way to learn about African music was to research the music around Lumko. My colleagues feared that, with missionaries having been active in the area for a long time, traditional music would have suffered, but this was gloriously incorrect. Around Lumko was a most marvelous area of musical preservation. A possible reason for this is that in the period about 1835 to 1850 the Thembu people, who were coming into the area, lived side-by-side with San people.<sup>30</sup> Inter-marriages took place. The strong musical culture of the San people clearly passed on to the Thembu people in that area today (see Dargie 1988, 24–28). The people around Lumko simply continued to practise their traditional culture (including music) without telling the missionaries about it.

Soon after I took up residence at Lumko, I began looking for the *uhadi*, the calabash-resonated percussion musical bow that Hugh Tracey had recorded and Andrew Tracey had told me had provided the basis of Xhosa scale and harmony, and other traditional instruments.<sup>31</sup>

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28 Dargie 1988, 79–81.

29 This is a guesstimate: I have not made any exact calculation.

30 These people are called San and also Bushman. Both names are unsatisfactory, but nowadays the people themselves—those still surviving—tend to use the name San.

31 Xhosa scale and harmony derive from the overtone patterns of the musical bows. Uhadi is the oldest Xhosa bow. The others, using the mouth or an oil tin as resonator, use the same harmonic system as uhadi. See Dargie 1988, 46–55.

There is not space in this article to write in depth about Xhosa music theory.<sup>32</sup> It must suffice to say that I found players of various kinds of bows, notably the uhadi master Nofinishi Dywili.<sup>33</sup> The Xhosa use of rhythm is extraordinary. Musicologists had written what they did not understand about it rather than what they did. It took me years, but finally I broke the Xhosa rhythm “codes,” and began to learn the extraordinary cross-rhythms in Xhosa singing.<sup>34</sup> As an example of typical rhythm usage from the Lumko area, see Figure 8.

**NONTYOLO**      The vocal parts : Ingoma, nentlobo, nezicabo  
Performance led by girls (H - leader, L - follower(s) )

Body movement (basis of clap and dance)

H 1      The usual leader line (voice or bow)

... No-ntyolo - lo, who .... No-ntyolo' u-zawu-b o- nwa. Who ....

H 2: variant of H 1, with iintlobo

bha - ne, ma - lo, ma. He! Ro-bha- ne, mnta- ka-ma- ma. He! Ro -

Figure 8. An example of Xhosa rhythm usage in the Lumko area.

In Figure 8, each score line shows a different rhythm. What is not shown is that clap delay technique may also be used. In this particular song, as many as four different rhythmic systems operate simultaneously.

I found things in Xhosa music that were until then unknown or only partially known. These included, in addition to the use of rhythm, a rich multiplicity of polyphonic parts in some songs, the playing of *imirhubhe* (singular: *umrhubhe*) mouth-bows in duet, a number of versions of the historic song of Ntsikana, including

32 Three important writings predate my study of Xhosa music. Rycroft (Rycroft 1971) wrote about the difficulty of analysing Xhosa rhythm, noting how voice beats and body rhythm beats did not coincide. However, he could not explain this. Hansen (1981) wrote a huge thesis covering the music of the entire Xhosa-speaking peoples. His thesis contains a great deal of information. Perhaps Hansen's main theoretical achievement was to point out the stylistic difference between the early Xhosa inhabitants of the Eastern Cape and later, intrusive groups who mostly came into the area as a result of the Mfecane, a pattern of wars that afflicted a vast area of South Africa as a result of the wars of Zulu King Shaka. However, Hansen also did not offer a satisfactory explanation for the Xhosa use of rhythm. Unfortunately, when producing my own dissertation (Dargie 1987), I did not find much theoretical material in Hansen on which I could build. My dissertation and my book (Dargie 1988) both concentrate strongly on the techniques of Xhosa music as exemplified in a small area, the Thembu Xhosa of the Lumko district. Xhosa rhythm in particular is extremely complex. I offered a solution in my thesis and my book, but I believe I have come closer to full understanding in an article presently awaiting publication, mentioned in footnote 22 below. Bigalke (1982) also wrote a thesis on Xhosa music, but his study is particularly concentrated on social and sociological aspects of the music of the Xhosa Ndlambe people. He hardly touches at all on the techniques of the music.

33 See Dargie 2010/11.

34 Dargie 1988, 82–87.

two versions using the uhadi bow. My most exciting “discovery” was the use of overtone singing, the first overtone singing documented in any African traditional music. This was the Xhosa *umngqokolo* singing, and especially the variety called *umngqokolo ngomqangi*.<sup>35</sup> Figure 9 shows an example of *umngqokolo ngomqangi*.

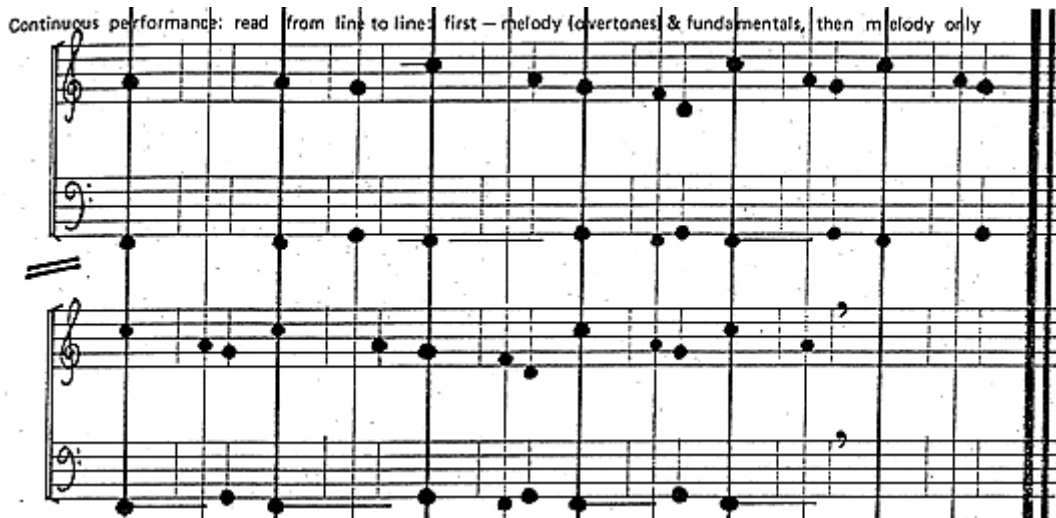


Figure 9. Umngqokolo ngomqangi overtone singing by Mrs. Nowayilethi Mbizweni. The singer creates deep fundamental tones (bass line) and sings the melody line by shaping the mouth.

From the beginning of my attempt to study Xhosa music, I was convinced that unless I could somehow perform at least some manifestations of that music, a purely “academic” attempt to understand Xhosa music could never bring significant insights. Quite early in my research around Lumko I learned to make and to play the uhadi – not anywhere near the level of skill employed by Nofinishi Dywili, but I could still render some of her songs, and also an uhadi version of the “Great Hymn” of Ntsikana, which I recorded at Mackay’s Nek near Lumko in 1981. The example of Ntsikana encouraged me to bring the uhadi into the church. I went so far as to compose some uhadi psalm settings (using response and verses to the same melody), which we sang sometimes at worship at Lumko.

I had to get moving on the creative composition workshops early in 1979, long before I was able to do any study of ethnomusicology or African music, or get in-depth into the study of Xhosa music. That is why I stated earlier that I was working in applied ethnomusicology before I had any training or experience as a musicologist. The workshop methods I was using had to enable the people themselves to create their own music in their own styles, based on their own knowledge of their music without any input from me, at least regarding proper use of call-and-response form,

<sup>35</sup> These “discoveries” are discussed in Dargie 1988. In 1993, I presented a paper on *umngqokolo* at the ICTM World Conference in Berlin, Germany: Dargie 1993.



melody, scale, harmony or rhythm, which the workshop participants knew from their own music traditions. In many cases, I needed to provide texts to be set to music: parts of the mass, new songs required for hymnbook use and so on. Sometimes, when it seemed opportune, I would suggest the composing of freedom prayer songs. Often it was necessary for me to suggest ways of setting long texts such as Glorias or Credos. Here I encouraged the composers to imitate methods used in Zimbabwe, in which the congregation would sing a constant response and the song leaders could build up the full text by singing verses. Much new church music in traditional styles was composed in this way. However, sometimes I had to work in other ways, giving input myself and even, on some occasions, composing new songs, mainly for singing with accompanying musical bow or marimbas.

## **Creating Church Songs as Part of Cultural Liberation**

In addition, I soon realized that creating their own church music for worship was a form of cultural and religious liberation for those people.<sup>36</sup> In Zimbabwe, the movement for new liturgical music went hand-in-hand with a national freedom struggle. So far as possible, I tried to point things that way in my own workshops. I not only tried to show people that by going to the roots of their own culture they were working for their liberation, I was also sometimes able to persuade them to create freedom prayer songs.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, it was also clear that people felt afraid at times, as for example on one occasion when people composed a number of such freedom prayer songs at a workshop in 1984, planned to use the songs at the community mass on the Sunday, and then did not sing a single freedom prayer song at the mass. I did not ask why—the reason was clear.<sup>38</sup>

## **The Heritage of Traditional Music: A “Personal Policy” Decision**

At the beginning of my work with African church music Andrew Tracey, son of Hugh Tracey who founded the International Library of Traditional Music (ILAM), had just brought ILAM to Rhodes University in Grahamstown. This gave me the opportunity for many discussions with Tracey. He told me of the damage often done to Africa's music heritage by missionaries. He was clearly anxious that I would act in the

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<sup>36</sup> See the conference paper Dargie 1984.

<sup>37</sup> Examples of such songs abound in the recordings and song collections of the “Dargie Collection” (Dargie 2000 to Present). See, for example, the CD and handbook set called “How Long,” which is a compilation of freedom songs.

<sup>38</sup> At the funeral of a police victim in Grahamstown in 1986, a group of women of the anti-apartheid Black Sash movement stood outside the township entrance singing “*Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika*” (Lord, bless Africa). A policeman came to them and warned that if they did not stop, they risked being shot.



same way. However, what I learned from Tracey made me determined that my work should contribute to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the people for whom I was working.<sup>39</sup>

## Bringing Traditional Music Styles into the Church

The first step was to bring the heritage of traditional music into the new church music. In workshops, my efforts at encouraging participants to use their traditional musical styles in their compositions often lacked tact, nevertheless some took these messages to heart. More and more compositions using traditional techniques resulted. In addition, some remarkable composers had already worked at producing new church songs in traditional styles. These included Zulu Benedictine Brother Clement Sithole. Another most talented Zulu composer came to light in workshops that I conducted at the Catholic Seminary in Pretoria. This was Paul Thembayona Manci, who to my delight has just been made rector of that seminary. Sadly my efforts to get Clement's and Manci's compositions into the new Zulu Catholic hymnal were dismissed by the missionary editor. Clement's songs, he told me, were "pagan" (despite being settings of the mass texts, and psalms sung with the *umakhweyane* musical bow). Manci, I was told, "could not even write his own music." Nevertheless the "Dave Dargie Collection"<sup>40</sup> includes CDs by Clement and Manci, as well as CDs containing selections of new church songs in the traditional styles of Xhosa, Zulu, Northern and Southern Sotho, Tsonga, Venda and other musics of South Africa, and of a number of peoples of Namibia, Swaziland, Lesotho and Botswana.

Traditional techniques and instruments feature in these collections, as well as an instrument type successfully introduced to Lumko. These were marimbas that were being used in Zimbabwe and elsewhere for church music. For the very great majority of people in Southern Africa, marimbas were not traditional instruments. By bringing marimbas to these peoples we were crossing a line, and at first I had doubts about it. However, it was at the request of Lambert Mpotulo, the long-time choirmaster and composer of the Zwelitsha parish, that Lumko colleagues Hirmer and Lobinger brought in marimbas. I too had to play my part in this.

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39 My efforts at heritage preservation did not prevent me from assisting in the development of neo-traditional music, such as promoting the marimbas introduced by Lumko into South Africa, especially when such changes were clearly beneficial to people or actually requested by local musicians. There was no contradiction or conflict. The same students who learned marimba playing from me at Fort Hare I also taught to play and make traditional musical bows.

40 Dargie 2000 to Present. There is further discussion on the "Collection" and how it may be accessed later in this article.

## Introducing Marimba Xylophones into South Africa

In 1977, Lumko imported three sets of marimbas from Kwanongoma College in Bulawayo. Until then, the only South African xylophones were the very few made and used by Venda traditional musicians. In 1979, Lumko set up a small factory for making marimbas in Umtata. I helped by designing the tuning system (based on Xhosa music). It became my task first to learn and then to teach people to play the marimbas. I worked out ways to adapt the use of Xhosa scale and harmony to marimba playing, and also ways to bring in the use of Xhosa rhythm. Traditionally the Xhosa did not use drums, until they learned the use of bass drums by observing the British military bands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>41</sup> The extremely complex and sophisticated use of cross-rhythm in Xhosa traditional music exists in the patterns created between movement of voice parts and body movement. It was necessary to find ways of expressing such rhythms in marimba playing. This often meant amplifying cross-rhythms into additive rhythms, for example. Figure 10 shows the marimba performance patterns of the song “*Ungumpriste ngonaphakade*” (“You are a priest for ever of the order of Melchisedek”) composed by the author for singing with the uhadi musical bow. A recording of the song may be heard on the CD *African Sunday Marimba Mass*, of the Dargie Collection. Similar marimba techniques were brought into the performance of numerous songs composed by a variety of composers.

I travelled far and wide in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Swaziland teaching marimba playing and adapting church songs to use with marimbas.<sup>42</sup> Today, marimbas are used in churches and schools in many places in South Africa, and many popular music groups are using “Lumko” marimbas, now produced by Tracey’s African Musical Instruments factory in Grahamstown and by other local makers. The first such group was Amampondo, whose CDs are now on sale in many countries around the world. Three of the six original Amampondo members were among the first church marimba groups that I taught, at Langa, Cape Town, in 1979.

This article deals to a large extent with the activities of the author. However, it is important to acknowledge the contribution others made to my work. For example, it was a young marimba player in Kwazakhele, Port Elizabeth, who in 1983 developed a new playing method using additive rhythms, which he was using to accompanying the Sanctus (*Ungcwele*) in Xhosa composed by Joseph Mziwamadoda Singiswa.<sup>43</sup> He and his colleagues proudly performed this for me. This new playing method spread like wildfire throughout the Xhosa church marimba

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41 Kirby 1968, 44–46.

42 In my time with Lumko, I conducted around 24 marimba workshops, recording masses performed on marimbas as part of many of the workshops.

43 This song with marimba accompaniment may be heard as track 13 on the CD *African Sunday Marimba Mass*, one of the CDs of the collection Dargie 2000 to Present.

6 pulse: 2+2+2 = 3+3 (clap delay: 1 pulse)

Soprano (S): U - ngum - pri - ste ngonapha - ka - de

Alto (A): U - ngum - pri - ste ngonapha - ka - de

Tenor (T): U - ngum - pri - ste ngonapha - ka - de

Bass (B): U - ngum - pri - ste ngonapha - ka - de

Clap: Overlapping leader (tenor)

Marimba (M):

Soprano (S): ngo - ko - hlo - bo lu-ka-me-ki - se dek'

Alto (A): ngo - ko - hlo - bo lu-ka-me-ki - se dek'

Tenor (T): ngo - ko - hlo - bo lu-ka-me-ki - se dek'

Bass (B): ngo - ko - hlo - bo lu-ka-me-ki - se dek'

Clap: Overlapping leader Start:

Marimba (M):

Soprano (S): bo, we - na. U - ngum - pri -

Alto (A): bo, we - na. U - ngum - pri -

Tenor (T): bo, we - na. U - ngum - pri -

Bass (B): bo, we - na. U - ngum - pri -

Figure 10. A marimba realisation of a song using 3-vs-2 cross-rhythm patterns. The players play by ear with much improvisation, not from score. The transcription in Figure 9 shows how the different marimba players may interpret their parts. Note how the soprano marimba player places melody tones with pulse delay, on the clap beats.

area, wonderfully transforming the music. Credit for developing exciting ways of playing the marimbas is due also to Amampondo and others of the new marimba groups. It was exciting for me to learn from people I had taught.

The downfall of apartheid undoubtedly allowed people to express their freedom in many new ways, including in their church music. When I presented the paper on “African Church Music and Liberation”<sup>44</sup> at one of the ethnomusicology symposiums organized by Andrew Tracey, at the question time Tracey asked: “To what extent do some of the church people feel they need liberating from you? Your approach is to get them to do things for themselves, but there’s quite a resistance among a large number of church members. They’re really happy with the stuff they know.”<sup>45</sup> My response included these words: “The way I see and justify my work is that it is part of liberating people from an oppressed mentality. Sometimes we don’t like to be liberated, so if I am knocked on the head I won’t be at all surprised.” I have not yet been knocked on the head, though on at least two occasions priests who had brought me in to teach some of the new songs were threatened by choir or congregation members that if that happened again, the church would be burned down.<sup>46</sup>

### **Working Directly for Heritage Preservation: Recording Traditional Music<sup>47</sup>**

The key tool in conducting composition workshops is the tape (or other) recorder. It is essential not only to record the compositions themselves, but with group composition it is also necessary to record all the stages of the work of composing. Composers are able to build up their work by listening to the recordings of spoken texts. In the beginning, I had only the simplest of tape recorders, with a built-in microphone, but as the work progressed I was able, through Lumko, to get excellent audio recording equipment. However, I had only very limited opportunities to make video recordings.

My Lumko work took me all over Southern Africa, south of the Angola, Zimbabwe and Mozambique borders. Wherever I went for church-music work, I also tried to make opportunities to record traditional music. Sometimes I had excellent results with this. Many missionaries were most supportive of my work, and helped me to

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44 Dargie 1984.

45 This question is included with the printed version of the paper, Dargie 1984, 12.

46 There were two main reasons for this: missionaries had taught their converts that African music was heathen, and that drums and other rhythm instruments were for use only by witch-doctors and indigenous churches – people incorrectly regarded as socially way beneath mainline church members. The second reason was that bringing in a change in the music used in church was a threat to the members of the choirs. Now the choirs could lose their glory as the emphasis passed to the music leaders in the congregation.

47 My Lumko budget was not large; my earnings were minimal. But it must be said that so far as possible I always made it a point to remunerate the traditional musicians I recorded.

make contact with traditional musicians. Brother Clement, for example, helped me to meet elderly traditional bow players, so that I could make unique recordings of Zulu music, including the last recordings made (as far as I know) of the most important traditional Zulu musical instrument, the *ugubhu* musical bow. The latest news from Brother Clement is that *ugubhu* is now sadly extinct in traditional Zulu music.

In 1979, looking for the uhadi musical bow, the Xhosa equivalent of *ugubhu*, in the Lumko district with the help of my colleague Fritz Lobinger, we found a woman in a nearby village who told us that she used to play uhadi, but she did not have to play it any more. Now we have the FM, she said – the radio. The radio, tape recordings and CDs have taken over places that used to be occupied by village musicians. This bow was once used by many South African peoples, but now only the Xhosa uhadi and possibly the Sotho version, *thomo*, are still extant. This trend was strongly in place before I began my work and before the “Lumko” marimbas were introduced. My “discovery” of the noted uhadi player Nofinishi Dywili undoubtedly sparked a revival of interest in uhadi and other musical bows in universities and with some popular music groups in the Xhosa area. Revived use of uhadi has moved parallel to the new interest in marimbas.

In my travels, I have been able to make recordings of rare instruments and even instruments not recorded before, but sadly many of these recordings may be the last-made as so many instruments and songs fall into disuse.<sup>48</sup> The latest to come under severe threat are the Xhosa overtone singing techniques called “ordinary” *umngqokolo* and *umngqokolo ngomqangi*, which I had been the first outsider to document from 1980–1983. Only five performers of the amazing *ngomqangi* version are still known, and some of them have been ill.

I was able to record quite a lot of traditional music, just as so much of it began to fall into disuse. My documentation includes fairly large numbers of Xhosa and Zulu recordings in South Africa, with significant collections also in Tsonga and Northern Sotho. Other areas included are Southern Sotho, Tswana and Venda. I was the first musicologist to record Kavango music. I made a number of recordings of musical bows and mbira types, and also a great deal of sung music with drumming in traditional styles in the many Kavango workshop compositions I recorded on a number of workshop tours in Namibia.<sup>49</sup> Other Namibian music in traditional styles I recorded among the Ovambo, Damara and Herero peoples. In addition, I made many recordings of music of the African Initiated Churches, mostly in Xhosa.<sup>50</sup>

In 1996, after I had returned to South Africa, Franciscan Father Laurence Anselm Prior, then director of Lumko Institute, returned all my original recordings to me with the wish that I would be able to make good use of them. All my recordings,

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48 As-yet undocumented instruments included the Kavango musical bow *lipuruboro* and the Jew’s Harp *ruwenge* (see Dargie 2013).

49 Dargie 2013.

50 A major reason for the emergence of these Churches was the desire to use their own culturally suitable music in worship (see Dargie 2010).



from the Lumko time and later, are now kept at the ILAM. All have been digitized by ILAM and are accessible through the Internet. Since 2000, I have been myself working on digitizing a selection of my audio recordings and all my Xhosa video recordings. The 47 audio CDs, one CD-ROM with photos and 9 DVDs compiled by me, together with 23 (so far) accompanying handbooks are now published by ILAM as the “Dave Dargie Collection.” Now all my recorded heritage material is accessible to students and musicologists world wide, as well as to the musicians themselves and their peoples.

### **The “Ngqoko Group”**

As a result of my Xhosa music research, musicians of the Lumko area became publicly known and were invited to perform, first at musicology conferences in Grahamstown, and then further afield. This led musicians of Ngqoko<sup>51</sup> village next to Lumko establishing the renowned Ngqoko Traditional Xhosa Music Ensemble, which has performed many times in America and Europe.

### **A Statement of Policy at the University of Fort Hare Music Department**

In 1984, at a culture festival at the University of Fort Hare in Alice, I met a former Rhodes University student of mine who was then working at the Fort Hare music department. He told me that the professor of music maintained that African music and jazz have no place in a university. I resolved that if ever I got the chance to put the matter right, I would take the opportunity. The opportunity came in 1994 when a friend of mine working at Fort Hare sent me a message that Fort Hare was looking for a professor and head for the music department.

In 1988, I visited Munich in Germany to do some church music work for a Catholic organization there. In 1989, I left Lumko, and feeling that I could no longer live with apartheid, went to Germany where in 1991 I married a lady I had met in 1988.<sup>52</sup> From 1989 to 1994 I lived in Munich, one of nearly forty ethnomusicologists in Germany without a full-time job. I began to prepare teaching materials, using my Lumko recordings and preparing written materials on the music. Then in 1994, with great joy, I stood in line at the South African consulate to vote at last for a democratically elected president of South Africa. Then came the opportunity I had hoped for, to change the music-teaching situation at Fort Hare. I applied for the

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51 Members of the Ngqoko Group have been able to earn money by their performing tours. Some tours have enabled them to build houses for themselves in the village. The Group may be heard and seen in the recordings of the “Dargie Collection.”

52 In time the Catholic Church recognised our marriage, so that I can still do music work for the church.



vacant position there, was invited to an interview at Alice, and flew out with an *uhadi* bow that I had made in Germany. In the interview I was asked what aims I might have for the music department. I stated my firm intention of bringing Xhosa and other African musics into Fort Hare, and as an example took up my *uhadi*, and sang an *uhadi* version of the ancient “Song of Ntsikana the Prophet” that I had recorded in 1981.<sup>53</sup> Fortunately a number of the interviewing committee were Xhosa people, and therefore knew about Ntsikana. I was not dismissed as crazy, but was offered the job.

## Changing the Direction of the Fort Hare Music Department

When I arrived at Fort Hare in January 1995, the department had been without a professor for some years. There were three lecturers, one of whom left very soon and another, somewhat later. The department offered a Bachelor of Pedagogy degree, a teaching qualification. One major subject could be music, the other either music education or a non-music subject. Graduates were far more likely to get teaching positions in non-music subjects – music teaching posts in schools were rare indeed. Fortunately, the process had already been started to move the music department from the faculty of education to the faculty of humanities. When this happened, we were able to convert our degree to a BA in music with two music major courses, “Music” and “Choral Music.” Subsidiary courses for the degree included other humanities courses up to second year; a third (non-music) major course was also allowed. After graduating, students could then do a diploma in teaching, but even with that the students’ hopes for teaching positions lay with their minor non-music subjects.

By 1997, Fort Hare had developed severe financial problems. The university narrowly escaped being closed by the government. A new vice-chancellor was appointed who in time brought the financial situation under control, but the pressure on small, “non-viable” departments such as music was great.

Fortunately, a set of “Lumko” marimbas had been obtained by the department some time before 1995. They had stood unused until in 1995 I began teaching students to play them, using mostly the Lumko marimba church songs. The students, perhaps all members of Christian churches, had no problem with this. We concentrated especially on the church versions of two of Ntsikana’s songs (the “Bell” and the “Great Hymn”).<sup>54</sup> I managed to persuade the university choir, which at that time had no connection with the music department, to let us accompany them at university occasions, especially graduations, singing Ntsikana’s songs and other religious songs. The high point came at the first graduation at which Prof. Derek

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<sup>53</sup> Dargie 1988, 203–204.

<sup>54</sup> Dargie 1988, 199.



Figure 11. Marimbas at the Fort Hare graduation ceremony, 1996.  
Three students and the author accompany the Fort Hare Choir, placed to the right of the author.

Swartz, the new vice-chancellor, presided. In his speech, he told about the effort that was being made to rescue Fort Hare, and said that when he heard Ntsikana's Song with the marimbas, it sounded so fine that he knew that the university would be saved. And also the Music Department, I said to myself.

At times, there were only two of us teaching in the department. The syllabus focused mainly on Western music, the only subject of particular African interest being choral music. The students' efforts at performance of Western music fell very short, with minor success only in singing. In music theory the highest achieved in recent times (by only one student) was at Grade 6 level – below school matriculation level. Yet the students showed great talent in singing and harmonizing and even teaching African songs, and were doing very well with marimba playing. It was clearly time to re-orient the teaching focus.

In 1998, I introduced the first changes in the official music syllabus, and completed the process in 1999. Andrew Tracey, who served as adjudicator for the new syllabus, commented that it was the "most Africa-orientated in any South African university."<sup>55</sup> That was a very positive step forward from the situation in 1984.

At Lumko, I had begun to try to teach music in a way based on tradition. The first marimba group I taught at Lumko was composed of four boys about fourteen

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55 The quotation is from Tracey's adjudicator's report on the proposed new Fort Hare music syllabi.

years of age. They had had no experience at all of keyboard instruments, or any instruments that had a visual link between order of pitches and ways of producing those pitches. I worked with them as I would have worked (orally) with a group of European youngsters: this note is C, the chord is C-E-G, and so on. It went painfully slowly. After more than half-a-year at last they could accompany an entire marimba mass. Then a mission close to Lumko obtained a set of marimbas. Instead of teaching that group myself, I arranged that our young group should go there and teach, allowing the new players to experience the songs as full performances. After two weekends, the new group could accompany the whole marimba mass. It was based on this and other experiences that I developed ideas on an African theory of music education.<sup>56</sup> As much as I could, I put these ideas into practice at Fort Hare.

In 2000, my wife had to return to Germany. At the beginning of 2001, I went onto part-time contract with Fort Hare so that I could live most of the time with my wife, and arranged that another full-time head of department be brought in. The third of these (in 2007) was Bernhard Bleibinger. The situation now is that, under Bleibinger, the department has gone from strength to strength.<sup>57</sup> A former student of mine from the 1990s, Jonathan Ncozana, is on the staff teaching African music, with students continuing to learn traditional Xhosa instruments and marimbas by observation and imitation.<sup>58</sup>

## In Conclusion

Angela Impey has this to say about applied ethnomusicology in South Africa:

Applied or advocacy ethnomusicology has yet to be developed as a formal sub-field in South Africa, yet researchers of music have the advantage of being at the forefront of a social reconstruction impetus that provides opportunities for relevant social engagement, the modelling of research foci, the expansion of multidisciplinary applications and the utilisation of participatory methodologies that have yet to be explored in research or performance.<sup>59</sup>

I believe that my work, described in this article, falls within the parameters outlined by Impey. I was a bit ahead of the time referred to by Impey: the early years of a democratic South Africa. Nevertheless, when I was working for Lumko the Freedom Struggle was preparing the way for the “New South Africa,” and the

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<sup>56</sup> Dargie 1996.

<sup>57</sup> Bleibinger has been able to broaden the aims and achievements of the music department, with music now taught in Alice and in East London, and a B.Mus. degree now offered in East London. It is most uplifting to see a number of lecturers teaching a variety of courses, way beyond the possibilities of my time as head of department.

<sup>58</sup> Sadly, at the time of revising this article (March 2016), Fort Hare has again been experiencing major financial difficulties and things have not been going as well as hoped in the music department.

<sup>59</sup> Impey 2002, 9.



Figure 12. Taking heritage back to the people.

The author recorded the Song of the Prophet Ntsikana (d. 1821) sung with the *uhadi* musical bow at Mackay's Nek in 1981. In 2002, 21 years later and 200 kilometres away, he performs the song with *uhadi* bow and Fort Hare University music students at the re-dedication of the grave of Ntsikana, Thwathwa, Eastern Cape (no. 1 on the map in Figure 1).

1994 South African election was a springboard for my work at Fort Hare. I believe my work played its part, at least in a small way, in social reconstruction, that what I did was an expression of social engagement. I believe also that my work fits into the pattern of ideals and objectives mentioned in the definitions for applied ethnomusicology offered in the introduction. Through my church music work, ordinary church members were enabled to create their own music for worship. Traditional and other musicians found ways to earn money through their music. The heritage left by many traditional musicians will not be lost. Today, many seem to think that marimbas are a normal part of the South African music scene. I am deeply grateful that I had opportunities to do the musical work I did. I did not create the opportunities, and I can claim little credit for what happened when I was turned to follow new musicological paths. But I do not regret having to put my own creative music aspirations aside. This is my ethnomusicological *apologia*.

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